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FOX VALLEY

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 1991

THE BEACON - NEWS

Oswego Park District wants boat ramp for new park

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Oswego

The park district here is seeking federal approval for a boat ramp at Saw-Wee-Kee Park, where some residents claim a waste dump threatens their safety.

The district has asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to build a boat ramp and dock about a quarter mile inside the 150-acre park, which lines the east bank of the Fox River south of Oswego. The district also plans to build a parking lot and access road to the ramp.

A pair of residents, however, have sued the district in the Kendall County Circuit Court, seeking an injunction blocking park work until the extent of hazards is determined. The suit by Neil Hambly and Wayne Capalby is pending before Judge James Wilson, who heard two days of testi-

mony in May.

District officials said they see the proposed ramp development as a separate issue from the issue of potential dump hazards in the lawsuit by Hambly and Capalby, two of several residents of Sundown Lane, which cuts through the center of the park.

Some parts of the park were used as a municipal dump until the early 1960s, when the district acquired it from the state Department of Conservation. The district also allowed filling of some water-filled lowlands in the past several years, according to testimony in the lawsuit.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency ordered the district to stop dumping pending a study of the fill activity and a cleanup plan. It gave the district until May 27 to clean up the debris, but district Executive Director Robert Gray said a 60-

day extension has been granted.

In tests of materials from the old dumpsite, a different area than the recent filling, the IEPA found high lead content in one of several samples. The agency had a similar complaint about dumping in 1988.

That old dump is across a park access road from where the new ramp, dock, parking lot and picnic area would be built this summer if the district gets the required permit.

Gray said the lawsuit and the proposed boat ramp are "absolutely unrelated." "It is a simple park improvement," he said.

The district's request asks for a permit for:

- A concrete ramp 60 feet long and 15 feet wide extending about 30 feet into the Fox River on the east bank.

- A floating boat dock 20 feet long and

5½ feet wide connected to a 10-foot-long walkway anchored to the shore. The dock would be on the upstream side of the ramp.

District plans for a \$60,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Conservation also include a parking lot and access road. The whole development would cover about one acre, he said.

Gray promised no work would be done until the suit is resolved, but a contractor was out "pushing some dirt around" on Wednesday.

Future improvements would include a picnic area with a shelter, tables, restrooms, drinking water facilities and barbecue grills.

He acknowledged that the old municipal dumpsite is across the park road from the proposed ramp area.

"If we need to fence it to keep (ramp)

users out, we will certainly do that. But there's no way you can even see in there except through the horse trail. That's the only way you can move through it. It's a jungle," he said.

Gray, during a break in the Kendall court hearing, claimed the suit was "a tool to get the boat ramp delayed."

"They like their peace and quiet and they don't want anyone to disturb it. The park district's aim is to improve the area somewhat, but leave vacant the majority in natural area," he said.

Aurora attorney Robert Pilmer, representing Hambly and Capalby, said that is not his clients' motivation.

"They realize from a practical standpoint that as long as the Oswegoland Park District complies with federal, state and local laws, they can pretty much do with the property as they see fit," he said.